

# ISLAMIC PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA

## INSIGHTS FROM THE WORLD'S LARGEST MUSLIM COUNTRY

*Jan Woischnik / Philipp Müller*

Following the upheavals in the Arab world and subsequent election successes of Islamic and Islamist parties in various countries, the role political Islam plays in the development and stabilisation of democratic political systems has once again come into public focus all over the world. International observers see the current and future politics of the new actors on the democratic stage as a concrete political test case for the compatibility of Islamic parties with values such as tolerance, constitutionality, protection of minorities and equal rights throughout the Muslim world. In fact, there have already been instances of parties with a pronounced Islamic agenda obtaining significant co-governing responsibilities after system upheavals and subsequent elections. Indonesia is a case in point. The Southeast Asian island nation, home to more Muslims than any other country in the world, has been a democratic state for more than 15 years – with the decisive involvement of Islamic parties.

What kind of parties are these, and what characterises their programmes and ideologies? What did the end of the authoritarian era (Suharto 1998) and the subsequent democratic opening-up (*reformasi*) mean for them, and how have they developed since? Were they and should they be seen as a challenge or perhaps even as an opportunity for Indonesian democracy? And not least: What insights can Indonesia's experience with Islamic parties offer to the countries in the Arab world – despite the cultural and political differences – and, by extension, to any international agents entrusted with the promotion of democracy?<sup>1</sup>



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1 | In line with the title of this issue of *International Reports*,

## POLITICAL ISLAM IN INDONESIA: FROM UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT TO GOVERNMENT BENCHES

**Indonesia's official state ideology of *Pancasila* explicitly permits six religious confessions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.**

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world. 88 per cent of the some 240 million inhabitants are avowed Muslims. In spite of this, the Southeast Asian island archipelago, which was first Islamised by traders from the Indian subcontinent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, does not have an Islamic system of government, nor is it an Islamic theocracy. Instead its official state ideology of *Pancasila* explicitly permits six religious confessions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The country has had a democratic constitution since the *reformasi* in 1998. There has been no change in this respect, but there has been talk of democratic stagnation in recent years, which is most noticeable in the fact that the qualitative further development of democratic processes, structures and institutions has come to a halt. Although Islamic mass organisations have also repeatedly made political demands since they were founded in the 1920s and 1930s, political parties with a clear Muslim agenda have only existed since Indonesia's independence from The Netherlands.<sup>2</sup> Under state founder and President Sukarno (1945 to 1967) and his successor Suharto (1967 to 1998), Islam was supported as a religion but repressed and marginalised as a political ideology, even though, in contrast to other Muslim countries, it was not declared the arch enemy of the reigning secular political elite.

this article mainly deals with Islamic-oriented political parties and only touches briefly on Indonesia's comprehensive and multi-layered phenomenon of Islamism or political Islam outside the party spectrum. Furthermore, the extremely influential Islamic mass organisations Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama (NU) are only dealt with in relation to their influence on political parties. Therefore, this article makes no claim to be exhaustive.

2 | Indonesia had already declared its independence from Dutch colonial rule on 17 August 1945. However, subsequent years saw repeated violent conflicts between Indonesia and the long-ruling colonial power the Netherlands, and it was not until after the UN conference in The Hague in 1949 that Indonesia's sovereignty was also formally recognised. Cf. UN, "World Recognition and Indonesia's Sovereignty", <http://www.un.int/indonesia/Indonesia/Indonesia/Indonesia-2.html> (accessed 27 Jul 2013).



Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono: Four Islamic parties are represented in his coalition. | Source: Marcello Casal, Agência Brasil ©📷.

After decades of authoritarian rule, the Asian crisis set the ball rolling and Indonesia experienced a democratic opening-up in 1997, which, in addition to the newly won civil liberties, also allowed the founding of numerous parties. The religio-political scene, which had been forced into the social and humanitarian fields during the Suharto period, awoke from the deep slumber imposed on it during the *Orde Baru* (so-called “New Order” under Suharto). This led to the founding of 42 parties with Islamic or Islamist symbols or ideology. In the end, 20 of these fulfilled the required conditions to contest the first elections following the end of the Suharto era in 1999.<sup>3</sup> Half of them managed to win at least one seat in the national parliament, and some have since played a decisive role in the development and consolidation of Indonesian democracy by generating a considerable share of the votes in some national elections or by participating in various government coalitions both in the past and the present. Their leading officials and elites occupy important posts in the politics, the cabinet, the administration and the institutions of the Indonesian state.

3 | Bahtiar Effendi, *Islam and the State in Indonesia*, Ohio University Press, Ohio, 2004, 200.

## **ISLAMIC AND ISLAMIST PARTIES IN INDONESIA – ORIGINS, PROFILES AND PROGRAMMES OF THE PKS, PKB, PAN AND PPP<sup>4</sup>**

Four Islamic parties are represented in the six-party coalition under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono from the Partai Demokrat (Democratic Party, PD), which has been governing since 2009. The most successful Islamic party with the most members, and therefore currently the most influential one in Indonesia, is the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (Prosperous Justice Party, PKS). The PKS was founded by young intellectuals from the Tarbiyah missionary movement and is the successor of the PK party, which did not succeed in entering parliament in the first free elections and therefore decided to undergo an extensive institutional and organisational reorganisation. For a long time the founders looked to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood for inspiration for their programme. At the beginning of its parliamentary career it was mainly the educated urban middle classes in Greater Jakarta who voted for the party. However, over the years, it has increasingly also won votes

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from traditional agricultural areas. The PKS is the only real cadre party in Indonesia. It conducts systematic youth work to educate future politicians as well as to engage in professional recruitment and training measures. PKS members must undergo years of training in small groups, which not only includes political lectures and topics such as managing election campaigns, but also meditation and exercises in confession as well as Koran recitation classes. Critics call this "ideological/religious indoctrination".<sup>5</sup>

Today, the PKS promotes itself as a moderate Islamic party and campaigns for values such as honesty and justice as well as the fight against corruption, prostitution and drugs. The party emphasises that although its agenda

4 | For reasons of simplicity we will not discuss all of the existing Islamic and Islamist parties here but only the most important parties that are also members of the current government coalition.

5 | Matthias Heilmann, "Islamismus in Indonesien: Der Erfolg der Gerechtigkeits- und Wohlfahrtspartei und seine möglichen Auswirkungen", *ASEAS – Österreichische Zeitschrift für Südostasienwissenschaften*, No. 1, 2008, 21, [http://seas.at/aseas/1\\_1/ASEAS\\_1\\_1\\_A3.pdf](http://seas.at/aseas/1_1/ASEAS_1_1_A3.pdf) (accessed 9 Sep 2013).

is characterised by the Islamic background of the party officials, it does not seek to establish an Islamic state.

Originally, however, it aimed to introduce an

Islamic society based on sharia law by democratic means. From its founding to the 2004 elections, the PKS campaigned strongly for the introduction of sharia law, but since then it has increasingly distanced itself from such

Islamist objectives. Recently, the party strategists and election campaigners have been focussing with notable success on the issue of fighting corruption. In the 2009 elections the PKS obtained 7.8 per cent, the best result among all the Islamic parties. The PKS found the majority of its supporters in religious urban society, where it portrayed itself as a law and order party promising to fight Indonesia's fundamental evils of corruption and nepotism.

**Up to the 2004 elections, the PKS campaigned strongly for the introduction of sharia law, but since then the party strategists have been focussing on the issue of fighting corruption.**

The role model for its programme has also changed over the years. In its search for ideological, institutional and programmatic models, the PKS has in recent years increasingly distanced itself from the Muslim Brotherhood, which they had emulated for a long time. Today, the PKS looks towards the Turkish government party AKP as their role model. The PKS leadership views the AKP as a successful example of the transformation of an Islamist party to a broad Muslim mass party with government responsibility.

The Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (National Awakening Party, PKB) originates from a social background characterised by traditionalist, Javanese religious practices often involving a connection to so-called *ulama* families, who were seen as erudite and who often ran boarding schools (*pesantren*). Simultaneously, these *ulama* families held important positions in the mass organisation Nahdatul Ulama.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the party's supporters and electorate were mainly recruited from the rural area of East Java. The party is inextricably linked to the first democratically elected president, Abdurrahman Wahid (1999 to 2001), better known as Gus Dur. The former NU chairman founded the party and prioritised NU functionaries for important

6 | Cf. Andreas Ufen, "Politischer Islam in Indonesien seit 1998", The Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb), 5 Mar 2012, <http://bpb.de/apuz/75768/politischer-islam-in-indonesien-seit-1998> (accessed 27 Jul 2013).

party positions. It was also Gus Dur who shaped the party profile significantly by promoting not solely religious but also secular-nationalist programme content. In August 2002, for example, the PKB voted against the inclusion of an Islamic-influenced judicial system in the constitution. This is why critics accuse him of significantly weakening the Islamic religion as a source of political power through widening the party programme and increasing the party's flexibility.

In contrast to the beginning of Indonesia's democratic transition, the PKB is now no longer considered the most important and influential party but just one of the country's several Islamic parties. In 1999 the party came out of the elections as the third strongest political force (12.6 per cent); but it then increasingly lost appeal over the years, only winning 4.9 per cent of the votes in the 2009 elections. Diminishing party cohesion and poor institutional structures are seen as reasons for this decline. Many also see the clientelistic party structures as the cause and apportion part of the blame to the former chairman and leading man of the party, President Gus Dur, who, as they claim, has permanently weakened the party through the strategic positioning of his cronies.

Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandate Party, PAN) is another Islamic party in the current government. Similar to the PKB, the PAN's ideological and inspirational roots lie in one of Indonesia's large Muslim mass organisations. Due to its more modernist views, Muhammadiyah is often seen as the NU's ideological counterpart and has long served the PAN as a programmatic and intellectual source of inspiration. Former Muhammadiyah chairman Amien Rais, who had won great admiration as a Suharto critic, founded the party in 1998. Although the Muhammadiyah organisation did not provide complete support for the founding of the party, prominent members of the mass organisation were instrumental in its inception – and they still occupy important posts in the party apparatus.

Programmatically the PAN sees itself as the voice of the well-to-do middle classes and correspondingly supports the fight against corruption and fraud. The party initially repeatedly attracted attention with intolerant and even

radical statements, for example calling for a “holy war” in the Moluccas together with other groups.<sup>7</sup> These ideological aberrations led to a significant number of moderate Muslims and Christians leaving the party in 2001. Today, in contrast, the PAN professes its belief in democracy and the values associated with it such as tolerance and the protection of minorities. Hatta Rajasa is currently the PAN’s most prominent representative. He is one of the most important ministers in the current cabinet and has been repeatedly associated with a possible presidential candidature in 2014.

The Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (United Development Party, PPP) is Indonesia’s oldest Islamic party. Founded in 1973 by state decree, it subsequently became an alliance of the smaller Islamic parties in Suharto’s party block system. Particularly in the nineties, the party was able to attract substantially greater numbers of votes due to the growing Islamisation of Indonesian society. The Islamic-modernist party was thus often able to capture a quarter of the electoral votes.

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The party was and still is mostly elected by NU members and members of the middle class. It is still attempting to differentiate itself from the other Islamic parties through a pronounced Islamist programme. Immediately after the beginning of the democratic opening-up in 1999, for example, the introduction of sharia law became one of the PPP programme objectives.

### **THE END OF SUHARTO: THE BEGINNING OF THE ISLAMIC PARTIES’ TRIUMPHAL MARCH?**

The question of the role of Islamic parties in Indonesian democracy can be answered more precisely if one looks to the past and analyses the initial conditions after the upheavals in 1998 as well as subsequent developments. Similar to many Arab states, Indonesia was under an authoritarian regime with a strong military influence for a

7 | Patrick Bolte, Kay Möller and Osman Rzyttka, *Politischer Islam, Separatismus und Terrorismus in Südostasien. Indonesien, Malaysia, Philippinen*, SWP-Studie, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin, Mar 2003, 18, [http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2003S12\\_bolte\\_mll\\_rzyttka\\_ks.pdf](http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2003S12_bolte_mll_rzyttka_ks.pdf) (accessed 9 Sep 2013).

long time (more than 30 years). For Muslim mass organisations, which had always harboured political ambitions, and advocates of active Islam, the Suharto period meant above all the suppression of all political demands and objectives. The result was that Muslim groups and organisations retreated from politics and instead dedicated themselves to social and humanitarian activities. At that time Muslim organisations thus founded, financed and managed hundreds of hospitals, social institutions and schools. It was only at the end of his rule that Suharto reached out to politically active Muslims to a limited degree, for instance by making the chairman of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI), Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, his deputy. This strategic about-turn was not so much a serious gesture of recognition of politically active Islam as it was the result of increasing differences of opinion between high-ranking military officials and Suharto.

With the end of the Suharto rule in 1998 in the wake of country-wide protests and the beginning of the *reformasi*, the founding of political parties was permitted overnight. During the political liberalisation led by interim president Habibie, hundreds of political parties were founded, many with an Islamic or Islamist orientation. For the first time in decades many Muslim activists were allowed to exercise political influence. In the first free elections after 30 years of the New Order, it seemed as if the triumphal march had begun for the Islamic parties. Five of them immediately won seats in parliament and together they attained more than 33 per cent in these first democratic elections. Through clever coalition negotiations one of their own, the PKS chairman Gus Dur, even succeeded in being appointed President of Indonesia (for two years at least).

Subsequent elections in 2004 brought additional votes, with the Islamic parties increasing their ballot-box approval to 35 per cent. The PKS achieved the largest increase, boosting its votes by 450 per cent from 1999 to 2004, and also became the most successful party in the megacity of Jakarta.<sup>8</sup> This was due to a smart campaign responding to

8 | Syahrul Hidayat, "Moderation and the stagnation of the PKS in the 2009 legislative election", *LSE IDEAS Reports*, London School of Economics, May 2010, [http://lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/reports/pdf/SR005/Indo\\_Hidayat.pdf](http://lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/reports/pdf/SR005/Indo_Hidayat.pdf) (accessed 27 Jul 2013).

the mood among the population, propagating good governance and honest, ethical politics.

The lowest point to date followed in the 2009 elections with Islamic parties losing votes and together attracting only 26 per cent of the votes. Considering that this represents the total number of votes for five parties<sup>9</sup> and that the PKS was in first place with around eight per cent, it is clear how much of a loss of political significance these parties with Islamic programmes and views have to deal with.

Current surveys predict further losses for Islamic parties in next year's parliamentary elections scheduled for 9 April 2014. The PKS may be particularly affected; according to current surveys they may not be able to attract sufficient votes to return to the national parliament. In Indonesia, such predictions should however be taken with a pinch of salt. It is difficult to generate reliable empirical data in this geographically disjointed island nation. Also, recent election victories in provincial and governor elections demonstrate that the religious parties are still a force to be reckoned with at least in some locations.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless this does not change the fact that the Islamic parties are experiencing a distinct general downward trend.<sup>11</sup>

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## INDONESIA'S SOCIAL ISLAMISATION

The increasing refusal to vote for Islamic parties on Election Day is very surprising considering the social development in terms of religiosity since the democratic opening-up in 1998. Looking back on the last 15 years, one can unreservedly state that the *reformasi* has not only led to political liberalisation and democratisation but simultaneously to social Islamisation. In the past few years, the role of Islam in public life has increased significantly, the Islamic mass organisations have gained new support

9 | This includes the PBB, which only attained 1.8 per cent and is therefore not represented in the current parliament.

10 | In West Java and North Sumatra, two of the candidates supported by PKS only recently won the elections to become provincial governors.

11 | Indonesian election commission, <http://kpu.go.id> (accessed 27 Jul 2013).

and the number of publically displayed Islamic symbols is increasing continuously. Every year more and more people are applying to the Ministry for Religious Affairs for one of the sought-after places on the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Religious belief is no longer a private matter but is increasingly leading to conflicts with members of other faiths. Outbreaks of violence against minorities within the community, and not only against followers of other faiths such as Christians but also against groupings within Islam such as Shiites or Ahmaddiyya, tend to occur more often.<sup>12</sup>



Muslim women's protest against a Miss World election in Jakarta, September 2013: Religious belief is no longer a private matter. | Source: © Bagus Indahono, epa, dpa.

The strength of Islam as a measure of social identification is growing. During a survey carried out in 2004, only around 40 per cent of Indonesians questioned stated that their affiliation with the Muslim religion was the most important criterion for their identity. Characteristics such as nationality, occupation or affinity to a particular ethnic group lagged far behind. A recently published survey concludes that 72 per cent of those questioned are in favour of the

12 | The renowned Setara Institute has already counted 282 cases of religiously motivated intolerance in the first half of 2013. Cf. Stephanie Hendarta, "Religious Intolerance Down Slightly in Indonesia: Setara", *The Jakarta Globe*, 9 Jul 2013, <http://thejakartaglobe.com/news/incidents-of-religious-intolerance-down-slightly-setara> (accessed 27 Jul 2013).

introduction of sharia law today.<sup>13</sup> But not all respondents were in favour of the introduction of draconian corporal punishment; indeed, a differentiated interpretation of the concept of sharia is apparent. But the recent survey does make it clear that the majority of the population fundamentally supports a more prominent role of religious principles and regulations in social and legal matters.

The increasing social Islamisation (also known as cultural Islam)<sup>14</sup> has also found political expression in recent years. A large number of laws and regulations clearly benefit the Muslim majority in Indonesia, granting Islamic legal and religious ideas a prominent position within Indonesian state and social systems. The province Aceh in the north of Sumatra represents a special case. Since it attained a special form of autonomy, Islamic legal principles have applied in most parts of the province. These compel women to wear a headscarf, for instance, prohibit alcohol consumption and gambling and enforce the payment of an alms tax (*zakat*). However, other provinces of the country, which do not have autonomy status, use so-called bylaws in order to circumvent national legislation and implement their own norms based on typically Islamic legal concepts – although they are generally not as rigidly implemented as is the case in Aceh.

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## **LACK OF POLITICAL DIVIDEND FOR ISLAMIC PARTIES**

Paradoxically, the Islamic parties have been unable to benefit from this Islamisation trend in society as a whole. Nor were they successful in claiming authorship of the Islam-oriented laws and regulations. They could not translate these two developments into political mobilisation – in fact the opposite is true. One of the reasons for this can be found in the programmatic opening-up of traditionally secular-nationalist parties, whose programmes and concrete political initiatives and strategies are increasingly geared

13 | "Seven in 10 Indonesian Muslims want sharia law: Pew study", *The Jakarta Post*, 2 May 2013, <http://thejakartapost.com/news/2013/05/02/seven-10-indonesian-muslims-want-sharia-law-pew-study.html> (accessed 27 Jul 2013).

14 | Jeff Lee, "The Failure of Political Islam in Indonesia: A Historical Narrative", *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 4, 2004, 101.

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towards allowing religion to play a larger role in public life. The Democratic Party (PD), which is part of the nationalist camp, no longer describes itself solely as *nasional*

but has also recently added the word *religius* to its election posters. The contest for the groups of voters for whom Islamic content is decisive has therefore been reignited. An increasing number of political actors are courting the favours of this section of the population. An example of the newly acquired programmatic flexibility of secular-nationalist parties such as the PD or the GOLKAR party is their voting behaviour during discussions regarding the controversial Anti-Pornography Legislation in the Indonesian Parliament in 2008. As expected, the Islamic parties were in favour of tightening the dress code for public places. Yet GOLKAR and the PD voted in favour as well. This openness towards traditionally religious content is complemented by the judicious selection of candidates to appeal to the electorate. In the 2009 elections, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), the party of state founder Sukarno's daughter, Megawati Sukarnoputri, therefore focused specifically on prominent liberal and moderate Muslims, persuading them to run for election under the PDIP banner. In this context, it will be interesting to see whether the Islamic parties will accept the loss of their unique selling point, or whether – particularly ahead of the 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections – they will take up the fight with formerly secular parties for the monopoly on interpreting specifically Islamic political content.

A further factor behind the Islamic parties' lack of political success lies in the positive economic development of the country since recovering from the 1997/1998 Asian crisis and the beginning of the *reformasi*. In recent years, Indonesia has developed into one of Asia's most important engines for growth besides India and China, with consistent annual economic growth of approximately six per cent. This resulted in a political dividend for the government of Yudhoyono in particular, who came into office in 2004 and was even able to increase its proportion of votes in 2009 on the back of this economic upturn. The fact that economic development influences the Indonesian population's voting behaviour was demonstrated in 1999 when more than a

third of those questioned in a survey named “the economy” as the top priority topic.<sup>15</sup> 14 years have since passed and Islamic parties are still unable to present innovative concepts in the area of economic policy to build credibility, trust and governing competence.

Despite the rapid economic rise of the G20 member state, Indonesia has had a side effect that could result in increasing the chances of success for Islamic parties in forthcoming elections. While the gross domestic product has grown rapidly in the last few years, the social disparity between rich and poor has also increased considerably. The creation of social equity is a core component of Islam, and this is demonstrated not least in the activities of the Muslim mass organisations in Indonesia. Therefore it is not inconceivable that Islamic parties could regain favour with the voters by making the tackling of current socioeconomic challenges the purpose of their authentic programme based on their Islamic background. But once again, the currently rather vague equation “Islam = social equity” would need to be developed into concrete and convincing problem solving strategies.

Furthermore, Indonesia’s specific political and party system is a major factor preventing the Islamic parties from mobilising the ongoing social Islamisation for their party-political purposes.<sup>16</sup> Individual personalities frequently dominate whole parties and their programmes. Voting is rarely based on content but instead on the popularity and prominence of the top candidates, who attempt to position themselves accordingly through a large media presence. In addition, increased commercialisation alongside extremely costly election campaigns make it practically impossible for less wealthy candidates to stand for a seat in parliament let alone the top position in a party. These factors, which have become systemic, have created a situation in which the mobilisation through programmes and therefore also religious content has become virtually impossible.

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15 | Cf. *ibid.*, 102.

16 | Michael Buehler, “Islam and Democracy in Indonesia”, *Insight Turkey*, 11, 2009, 56.

In recent years it has also become increasingly clear that the gap between rhetoric and action has widened in the Islamic parties as well. This has led to considerable threats to their credibility in the eyes of their voters. Numerous corruption scandals have shown that politicians of explicitly Islamic parties succumb to the same temptations as those of secular-nationalist parties. This is particularly fatal for the chances of political success of Islamic parties because they are the ones who have been pushing issues such as fighting corruption and good governance to the fore in recent years – not least to differentiate themselves from non-Muslim parties. For example, the slogan of the PKS was *Bersih dan Peduli* (clean and caring) for quite some time. That may well be a thing of the past, particularly since the entanglement of high-ranking and prominent PKS functionaries, such as former chairman Luthfi Hasan Ishaq, in massive corruption cases. The media have reported extensively on these cases, which have severely damaged the party's credibility.

#### **ISLAMIC PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA – FROM THREAT TO OPPORTUNITY?**

15 years after the introduction of democracy in Indonesia, the opportunity has arisen to take stock of the relationship between Islamic and Islamist parties and democratic principles and core beliefs. Are staunchly Islamic parties compatible with democratic forms of government? Or is this the self-fulfilling prophecy of the so-called "democratic dilemma", according to which, once established, democracy will be substantially undermined by antidemocratic actors such as Islamists, as these actors now also gain access to and exploit new spheres of influence and opportunities to shape the future?

In this regard the situation in Indonesia is not quite uniform. On the one hand, the PKB and the PAN express their commitment to the separation of state and religion as well as democracy and the rule of law. They are part of the current government coalition in Indonesia, and their concrete political actions, initiatives and measures show that they feel bound to democratic values and principles. Non-Muslims can become members of both parties and all in all there is little doubt as to their democratic competence.

On the other hand, there is the PPP, also part of the current government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, which must be rated more negatively in terms of its democratic competence. The current PPP chairman is at the same time the Minister of Religious Affairs in President SBY's cabinet and happens to attract attention with critical statements towards religious minorities. A former chairman of PPP, who was Megawati Sukarnoputri's vice president, openly defended subsequently convicted terrorist leader Bashir, demanding that if they prosecuted Bashir, the police should arrest him too.<sup>17</sup> Although such high-ranking PPP functionaries do not commit violence themselves, they can be seen as spiritual instigators. The PPP thus participates in democracy without actively supporting it. It is more likely to threaten democracy than further it.

It is harder to analyse the PKS, which is also part of the current government coalition. Generally speaking, democratic values such as pluralism, women's equality, the protection of minorities, non-violence and openness

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towards other faiths have become part of the official party line. The party made a point of holding its 2008 national congress on Bali, where the majority of the population is Hindu, thereby presenting itself as tolerant and open towards other religions, cultures and ethnicities. However, well-respected observers suspect the existence of a contrary hidden agenda striving towards sociocultural re-education of the people and the realisation of a global *ummah* as the ideal human community and the accomplishment of God's will.<sup>18</sup> At this point in time it does not yet seem possible to come to a final conclusion on the democratic competence of the PKS.

## **NORMALISATION AS A CONSEQUENCE OF DEMOCRATISATION**

In contrast to some countries in the current Arab world, Indonesia's Islamic parties have never had sole governmental responsibility. They were and are only part of a multi-party coalition. How the groups mentioned above would behave in the case of sole governance and whether

17 | Cf. Lee, n. 14, 104.

18 | Cf. Heilmann, n. 5, 21.

they would still follow democratic rules cannot be assessed with any certainty based on today's situation. However, if one examines the gradual programmatic and ideological development of Indonesia's parties overall, a common pattern appears despite the many differences.

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The ideological programmes as well as the concrete political actions of the above-mentioned parties (with the exception of the PPP) have all become more pragmatic in recent years, with a clear departure from politics strongly dictated by Islamic ideology becoming apparent. Over the years, Indonesia's Islamic parties have distanced themselves increasingly from previous, in part radical positions such as the introduction of an Islamic state or aligning all areas of life with Islamic religious beliefs and behavioural ideals. While the introduction of sharia law was the main objective of the PKS's party programme at the beginning of the democratic transformation, issues such as pluralism, fighting corruption, political reforms and democratisation have taken its place over time.

It is striking that this programmatic development of numerous Islamic parties has taken place alongside Indonesia's increasing democratisation over the last 14 years. The development of democratic institutions, structures and processes has prompted the Islamic parties to change their programmes and behaviour accordingly so that they can exert influence within the new government structures. When the PKB boldly pushed for a sharia legal framework in 2003, they did find support for their suggestion in some other organisations. However, in the end they lacked a solid parliamentary majority, which meant that the PKB had to submit to the democratic rules and retract its proposal. In the case of the PKS, there are also a few examples of the connection between the party's programmatic normalisation and the progressive democratisation of the state. When Megawati Sukarnoputri became President and offered the PK (the PKS's predecessor) a ministerial post, it refused because it saw leadership as a male prerogative and therefore did not want to be subordinate to a female president. In the 2004 electoral campaign there was a fierce debate within the PKS regarding the question of which presidential candidate it should support. Under consideration were Amien Rais, a strict Muslim reformer, and

former military general Wiranto. Only two weeks before the election, the party leadership decided on Amien Rais after the majority of the party had been in favour of Wiranto for some time. The reason for this hesitation was a deeply pragmatic one: it was thought that Wiranto simply had a better chance of winning. The PKS acted equally pragmatically when its candidate did not reach the second round during the 2005 presidential elections, and the party then supported Yudhoyono/Kalla, the duo with the best chance of success. After Yudhoyono had won the second round of the presidential elections, the PKS achieved its objective and also became a governing party.<sup>19</sup> Since the PKS has been part of this government coalition, the pragmatic decisions of the party leadership have increased in frequency and have led to partly vehement conflict with the party committees and many simple members. The parliamentary institution as well as the democratic necessity to form coalitions for the purpose of government formation ultimately forced the PKS to temper its formerly confrontational and strictly Islamic politics.

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Furthermore, elections as a democratic instrument have led to the surrender of Islamist ideals and the replacement of these with more strategically advantageous positions. The parties have realised that the coercive introduction of Islamic rules of law would endanger Indonesia's multi-religious and multiethnic national unity and would therefore not convince enough people on Election Day. This meant a move towards issues and objectives which would attract more voters. This said, the Islamic parties' acceptance of democratic processes has not led to the end of political Islam per se. However, having to comply with democratic processes and structures imposed new limitations on the parties. These examples alone clearly demonstrate that an open democratic system can have a balancing and deradicalising effect on (previously strictly) Islamic parties.

19 | Ahmad-Norma Permata, "Ideology, institutions, political actions: Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in Indonesia", *Asienkunde* 109, German Association for Asian Studies, Oct 2008, 33, [http://asienkunde.de/content/zeitschrift\\_asien/archiv/pdf/109\\_3\\_permata.pdf](http://asienkunde.de/content/zeitschrift_asien/archiv/pdf/109_3_permata.pdf) (accessed 9 Sep 2013).

It should be noted that none of Indonesia's Islamic parties in their current form pose a structural threat to the country's democratic constitution. Today, only a small number of insignificant parties campaigns for antidemocratic policies such as the establishment of an Islamic theocracy. In contrast, the more important Islamic parties are satisfied with often ineffective demands for a society based on Islamic values and morals. But the programmatic normalisation of the parties described above is by no means the end of political Islam, which remains highly influential. In contrast to the Islamic parties within the democratic arena, it is the Islamic forces outside parliament that pose an ongoing and nationwide threat to Indonesia's democratic and constitutional framework.

### **ISLAMISM AND POLITICAL ISLAM OUTSIDE THE PARTY SPECTRUM**

One of the manifestations of political Islam outside the party spectrum is the missionary movement Hizbut Tahir Indonesia (HTI), which forms part of a transnational Islamic network and wants to establish a so-called Islamic state in Indonesia. Despite its radical, antidemocratic objectives, the HTI explicitly renounces violence. Instead, it relies on preaching and doctrine. The Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Ulema Council, MUI) is a council of scholars founded by the Suharto regime in 1975 and received its independence in 2000. It does not use violence either, but it can issue (not legally binding) *fatwas*, thereby often acting as a spiritual instigator. For example, violent mobs have repeatedly referred to a *fatwa* dating from 2005, in which the MUI spoke out against liberalism, pluralism and secularism. Aside from these, there are many of organisations willing to resort to violence in the country, purporting to promote public order and Islamic values (so-called vigilantes).

The scene is as complex as it is dynamic, and it is growing. All of these organisations oppose a "westernisation" of society, which they equate with decadence and immorality, and they oppose greater freedom for women. They are striving for the establishment of an Islamic state and the implementation of sharia law as ordained by God. The Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defender's Front, FPI)

is currently the most active and well-known group. It has been successful in controlling public discourse time and again. The FPI was for instance instrumental in causing the cancellation of a concert by pop star Lady Gaga in 2012. The group threatened violent clashes if the singer, who from their point of view dresses too risqué, was allowed to perform. These groups pose a threat to Indonesia's democracy because besides their power to mobilise society they often succeed in exerting influence on people in politics and in the administration in such a way that they accede to the Islamists' goals and demands. This external influence means that democracy loses a considerable portion of its attraction and legitimacy, as the state's inability to safeguard its monopoly on force creates the impression that democracy is an incapable and easily manipulated form of government.

#### **EXPERIMENTAL LABORATORY INDONESIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ARAB WORLD?**

In relation to the upheavals in the Arab-Islamic world, Southeast Asian Indonesia is often upheld as a model for the development of democracy in a predominantly Muslim country.<sup>20</sup> After all, the starting conditions are comparable. For many years the political aspirations of Islam were repressed by a secular military regime not only in the countries of the Arab Spring but in Indonesia as well. Most notably U.S. President Barack Obama, as well as his former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, held up Indonesia as an exemplary model and expressed hopes for a similarly positive development for Egypt.<sup>21</sup>

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While these hopes are justified, Indonesia's potential to act as a guiding beacon should not be overestimated; Indonesia's cultural, religious and political conditions differ too much from those in the Arab world. Historic and cultural events have led to Islam in Indonesia comprising a mixture of ideas from different religions and denominations in

20 | Jay Solomon, "In Indonesia, a Model for Egypt's Transition", *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 Feb 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704329104576138490822239336.html> (accessed 27 Jul 2013).

21 | Cf. *ibid.*

many areas – often stated as the reason for the emergence of a more moderate form of Islam in the country. Moreover, the political system with its focus on personalities is fundamentally different from the conditions in other Muslim countries. There is also the sobering question as to whether countries in the Middle East even perceive the distant Indonesia as a positive example. If one were to ask people in an Arab country to name the largest Muslim country in the world or the leading Muslim country, the answer would likely be Egypt or Saudi Arabia. In addition, the Arab world often views Indonesia and the cultural and spiritual expression of the Islamic faith there as too diluted and distorted. Regarding the democratic integration of political Islam, the transferability of Indonesia's experience to the Muslim-Arab world therefore seems limited to say the least.

Despite these differences, Indonesia's 15 years' experience of a tense relationship between political Islam and democratic government can provide some fundamental insights. These conclusions are probably not only interesting for the friends and supporters of democracy living in Arab countries. Specifically for international observers and institutions involved in development cooperation, particularly in cooperation with political parties, Indonesia offers some insights that could lead to inspiration for the aims and design of future initiatives.

Most importantly, Indonesia's example makes it clear that political Islam in the form of parties based on Islamic values and goals does not automatically equate

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to radicalism, fanaticism and antidemocratic politics. Islamic parties do have the potential to transform, slowly but surely, into democracy-friendly political actors and assume responsibility in democratic institutions. As shown by the example of Indonesian parties, the possibility of an initially unexpected programmatic and ideological transformation after the establishment of a democratic system of government cannot be ruled out. With this in mind, one should not categorically refuse contact with those Islamic parties that are fundamentally tolerant and open to democratic principles, but instead actively seek out partners in the area of party cooperation and commit them to democratic values

long term. Qualification criteria for cooperation should include an explicit commitment to democracy and the rule of law, to a pluralistic society and religious tolerance as well as the safeguarding of national and international peace.

Indonesia's example further demonstrates that the election results for Islamic parties do not always provide an indicator for the prevailing mood among the population. Weak or stagnating results for Islamic and Islamist parties at the ballot box do not necessarily mean political Islam is losing importance generally. A number of different factors can play a role here, from the increasing Islamisation of formerly secular-nationalist parties to the loss of credibility due to entanglement in scandals. Such a development could also occur in countries of the Arab-Islamic world. However, if political parties of Islamic orientation are no longer in a position to represent the moods and interests of the population and channel them towards the government, then, as in Indonesia, there is the danger that other groups outside of the party spectrum, which are frequently prepared to use violence, will be able to exploit society's mood to gain and exert influence. In general, however, Islamic parties have a keen interest in being and remaining the only legitimate, authentic and trustworthy representatives of political Islam in their countries. This is where local and international agencies can become involved, working with Islamic parties to help create the prerequisites in terms of skills, personnel and content and open up opportunities for appropriate political representation of the interests and needs of the country's Muslims.